Under His Shadow

Lionel Hartley

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Red Range Radio 2014

Under His Shadow
by Lionel D C Hartley
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Pericope

Psalm 91

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

2) I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

3) Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.

4) He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

5) You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day,

6) nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

7) A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

8) You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

9) If you make the Most High your dwelling--even the Lord, who is my refuge--

10) then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.

11) For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;

12) they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

13) You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

14) "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

15) He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him.

16) With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation." (NIV)

Part 1:
Hit by a Shadow

Donald Gray Barnhouse was the pastor of Philadelphia's Tenth Presbyterian Church, when his wife died and left him with young daughters to raise alone.

He did something hardly anyone else could do, he conducted his own wife's funeral.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, Sr.

Ruth Barnhouse

It was while driving to that funeral that he realized he had to say something to explain all of this to his girls, somehow to put into perspective for them something with which he himself was already struggling.

They stopped at a traffic light while driving to the funeral. It was a bright day, and the sun was streaming into the car and warming it. A truck pulled up next to them, and the shadow that came with the truck darkened the inside of the car.

It was then that he turned to his daughters and asked, "Would you rather be hit by the shadow or by the truck?"

One of them responded, "Oh, Daddy, that's a silly question. The shadow can't hurt you. I would rather be hit by the shadow than by a truck."

It was then that he tried to explain to them that their mother had died, and that it was as if she had been hit by a shadow. It was as if Jesus had stepped in the way in her place, and it was he who had been hit by the truck.

He quoted the familiar words of Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are

with me."

I must confess for this homily "Under His Shadow", as the man did of the axe which fell into the stream and later floated, that the title is borrowed and many thoughts come from my best recall of segments of a sermon by Spurgeon that I read many years ago. The title comes from the last ever poem by the late hymnist and poet Francis Ridley Havergal.

Havergal was the author of such well-known hymns as "Take My Life and Let It Be", "Like a River Glorious", "I Gave My Life for Thee", "Tell It Out", "Who Is on the Lord's Side?", "Lord, Speak to Me That I May Speak", "I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus" and "Thou Art Coming, O My Saviour".

Havergal's last poem was published with the title, "Under His Shadow," and her preface gives the reason for the name. She said, "I should like the title to be, 'Under His Shadow.'[as] I seem to see many pictures suggested by that: under the shadow of a rock in a weary plain; under the shadow of a tree - closer still, under the shadow of His wing - nearest, and closest - in the shadow of His hand. Surely that hand must be the pierced hand, that may oftentimes press us sorely, and yet evermore

encircling, upholding, and shadowing."

"Under His Shadow," is our subject, and we will in a few words enlarge on the Scriptural plan that Miss Havergal has bequeathed to us. My key thought is Psalm 91:1 "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

This thought was versified in 1719 by Isaac Watts who wrote, *"Under the shadow of thy throne, still may we dwell secure; sufficient is thine arm alone, and our defence is sure."*

I recall reading somewhere that the shadow of God is not the occasional resort, but the constant abiding-place, of the Christian. Here we find not only our consolation, but our habitation. We ought never to be out of the shadow of God. It is to dwellers, not to visitors, that the Lord promises His protection.

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty:" and, as Spurgeon has said, that shadow will preserve him from nightly terror and ghostly ill, from the arrows of war and of pestilence, from

death and from destruction. Guarded by Omnipotence, the chosen of the Lord are always safe; for as they dwell in the holy place, hard by the mercy-seat, where the blood was sprinkled of old, the pillar of fire by night, the pillar of cloud by day, which ever hangs over the sanctuary, covers them also. Is it not written, "In the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion, in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me"?

What better security can we desire? As the people of God, we are always under the protection of the Most High. Wherever we go, whatever we suffer, whatever may be our difficulties, temptations, trials, or perplexities, we are always "under the shadow of the Almighty."

Over all who maintain their fellowship with God, the most tender guardian care is extended. Their heavenly Father Himself interposes between them and their adversaries.

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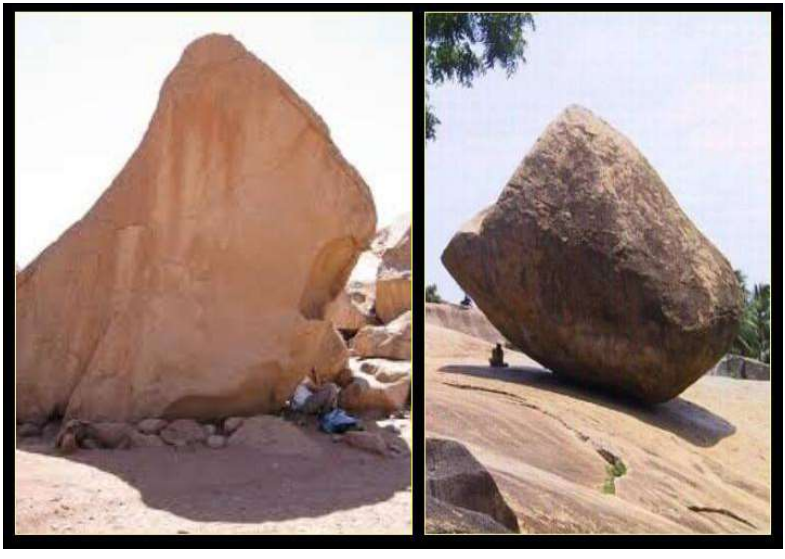
Part 2

The Shadow of a Great Rock

I will begin with the first picture which Miss Havergal mentions, namely, the rock sheltering the weary traveller: - "The shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isaiah 32:2).



Now, I take it that this is where we begin to know our Lord's shadow. He was at the first to us a refuge in time of trouble. Imagine our spiritual journey as like the desert traveller: weary was the way, and great was the heat; our lips were parched, and our souls were fainting; we sought for shelter, and we found none; for we were in the wilderness of sin and condemnation, and who could bring us deliverance, or even hope? Then we cried unto the Lord in our trouble, and He led us to the Rock of ages, which of old was cleft for you and me.

We saw our interposing Mediator coming between us and the fierce heat of justice, and we accepted the blessed screen. The Lord Jesus was to us a covering for sin, and so a covert from wrath.

The sense of divine displeasure, which had beaten upon our conscience, was removed by the removal of the sin itself, which we saw to be laid on Jesus, who in our place and stead endured its penalty.

Fanny Crosby wrote, *"A wonderful Saviour is Jesus my Lord, a wonderful Saviour to me, He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock, where rivers of pleasure I see. He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock that shadows a dry, thirsty land; he hideth my life in the depths of His love, and covers me*

there with His hand."

The shadow of a rock is remarkably cooling, representative of Jesus comforting us. The shadow of a rock is more dense, more complete, and more cool than any other shade; and so the peace which Jesus gives passes all understanding, there is none like it. No chance beam of light darts through the rock-shade, nor can the heat penetrate as it will do through the foliage of a forest.

Jesus is a complete shelter, and blessed are they who are "under His shadow." Let us take care that we abide there, and never venture forth to answer for ourselves, or alone to brave the accusations of Satan.

As with sin, so with sorrow of every sort: the Lord is the Rock of our refuge. No sun shall smite us, nor any heat, because we are never out of Christ. The saints know where to fly, and they use their privilege.

I quote Havergal: *"When troubles, like a burning sun, Beat heavy on their head, To Christ their mighty Rock they run, And find a pleasing shade."*

There is, however, something of awe about this great shadow.

Never fear shadows. That just means a light's shining somewhere nearby.

However, a rock is often so high as to be awesome, and we may well tremble in presence of its greatness.

The idea of littleness hiding behind massive greatness is well set forth; but in the image in our mind's eye of the shadow of a rock there is no tender thought of fellowship, or gentleness: even so, at the first, we view the Lord Jesus as our shelter from the consuming heat of well-deserved punishment, and we know little more.

It is most pleasant to remember that this is only one panel of this manifold picture.

Inexpressibly dear to my heart is the deep cool rock-shade of my blessed Lord, as I stand in Him a sinner forgiven; and yet is there more.

Part 3:
The Shadow of the Apple Tree

Our second picture, that of the tree, is to be found in the Song of Solomon 2:3 "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste."

Apart from the intimate marital connotations, here we have not so much refuge from trouble as special rest in times of joy. With sanctified imagination I picture the Shulamite is happily

wandering through a wood, glancing at many trees, and rejoicing in the music of the birds. One tree specially charms her: the citron with its golden fruit wins her admiration, and she sits under its shadow with great delight; such was her beloved to her, the best among the good, the fairest of the fair, the joy of her joy, the light of her delight. Such is Jesus to the believer.

The sweet influences of Christ are intended to give us a happy rest, and we ought to avail ourselves of them; The lover "sat down under His shadow."

In the New Testament chronicle, this was Mary's better part, which Martha well-nigh missed out on by being encumbered with care. That is the good old way wherein we are to walk, the way in which we find rest unto our souls.

The Sabbath, for example, is a rest for us, and we ought to be able to sing, "I sat down."

Brothers and sisters, is Christ to each one of us a place of sitting down? I do not mean a rest of idleness and self-content — may God deliver us from that — but there is rest in a conscious grasp of Christ, a rest of contentment with Him and in Him as our all in all.

God grant us to know more of this!

This shadow is also meant to yield perpetual solace, for the spouse did not merely come under it, but there she sat down as one who meant to stay. Continuance of peace and joy has been purchased for us by our Lord's perfected work.

Under the shadow of the tree the Shulamite found food; she had no need to leave it to find a single needful thing, for the tree which shaded also yielded fruit; nor did she need even to rise from her rest, but sitting still she feasted on the delicious fruit. You who know the Lord Jesus know also what this means.

The spouse never wished to go beyond her Lord. She knew no higher life than that of sitting under the shadow of her beloved. She passed the cedar, and oak, and every other goodly tree, but the apple tree held her, and there she sat down.

"Many are those that ask, "who will show us any good?" But as for us, O Lord, our heart is fixed, resting on You. We will go no further, for You are our dwelling-place, we feel at home with You, and sit down beneath Your shadow."*

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* Psalm 57:7

Some Christians cultivate reverence at the expense of childlike love; they kneel down, but they dare not sit down.

Our Divine Friend and Lover wishes that it was not like that; He would not have us stand on ceremony with Him, but come boldly unto Him.

Hebrews 4:16 says, *"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."*

We must not be ashamed to use His sacred name as an everyday word. We can still express our reverence and use the name Jesus as a household word. We can run to Him anytime as to a dear familiar friend.

Under His shadow we are to feel that we are at home, and then He will make Himself at home with us by becoming food to our souls, and give spiritual refreshment to us while we rest.

The spouse does not here say that she reached up to the tree to gather its fruit, but she sat down on the ground in intense delight, and the fruit came to her where she sat.

It is wonderful how Christ will come down to

those who sit beneath His shadow; if we can but be at home with Christ, He will sweetly commune with us.

David the Psalmist said, "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Psalm 37:4) In this second form of the sacred shadow, the sense of awe gives place to that of restful delight in Christ.

Have you ever pictured yourself in such a scene as the sitter beneath the grateful shade of the fruitful tree? Have you not only possessed security, but experienced delight in Christ?

Have you sung Havergal's words, *"I sat down under His shadow, Sat down with great delight; His fruit was sweet unto my taste, And pleasant to my sight"*?

This is as necessary an experience as it is joyful: necessary for many uses. The joy of the Lord is our strength, and it is when we delight ourselves in the Lord that we have assurance of power in prayer. Here faith develops, and hope grows bright, while love sheds abroad all the fragrance of her sweet spices.

Oh! Come to the apple-tree, and find out who

is the fairest among the fair. Make the Light of heaven the delight of your heart, and then be filled with heart's-ease, and revel in complete content.

Part 4:
The Shadow of His Wings

The third view of the one subject is the shadow of his wings. I think the best specimen of it, for it occurs several times, is in that wonderful Psalm, the sixty-third, verse seven.

Look at it with me: Psalm 63, verse 7.

"Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice."

Does not this set forth our Lord as our trust in hours of depression? In the Psalm now open before us, David was banished from the means of grace to a dry and thirsty land, where no water was. What is much worse, he was in a measure away from all conscious enjoyment of God. He says, "Early will I seek Thee. My soul thirsteth for Thee." He sings rather of memories than of present communion with God.

We also have come into this condition, and have been unable to find any present comfort. "Thou hast been my help," has been the highest note we could strike, and we have been glad to reach to that.

At such times, the light of God's face has been withdrawn, but our faith has taught us to rejoice under the shadow of His wings. Light there was none; we were altogether in the shade, but it was a warm shade. We felt that God who had been near must be near us still, and therefore we were quieted.

Our God cannot change, and therefore as He

was our help He must still be our help, our help even though He casts a shadow over us, for it must be the shadow of His own eternal wings.

The metaphor is, of course, derived from the nestling of little birds under the shadow of their mother's wings, and the picture is singularly touching and comforting.

The little bird is not yet able to take care of itself, so it huddles down under the mother, and is there happy and safe. Disturb a hen for a moment, and you will see all the little chickens huddling together, and by their chirps making a kind of song. Then they push their heads into her feathers, and

seem happy beyond measure in their warm abode. When we are very sick and sore depressed, when we are worried with the care of whining children, the troubles of a needy household, and the temptations of Satan, how comforting it is to run to our God — like the little chicks run to the hen — and hide away near His heart, beneath His Wings.

Oh, weary ones, press closely to the loving heart of your Lord, hide yourselves entirely beneath His wings! Here awe has disappeared, and rest itself is enhanced by the idea of loving trust.

The little birds are safe in their mother's love, and we, too, are beyond measure secure and happy in the loving favour of the Lord.

Remember too, that God does not comfort us* to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters.

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* See 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Part 5:
The Shadow of His Hand

The last form of the shadow that I will share today (although there are many more) is that of the hand, and this, it seems to me, points to power and position in service.

Read with me Isaiah 49:2: *"And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me;"*

This undoubtedly refers to the Saviour, for the passage continues: *"And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God. And now, saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him, though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength. And He said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth."*

Christ was hidden away in the hand of His Father, to be used by Him as a polished shaft for the overthrow of His enemies, and the victory of His people.

Yet, inasmuch as it is Christ, it is also all of Christ's servants, since as He is — so are we also in

this world.

Frances Havergal wrote one of her most famous poems while she was in Dusseldorf, Germany. She had gone to Germany to do some specialized study. While there, she saw a copy of Sternburg's great painting: The Crucifixion. The title above the picture was, *"All this I did for thee; what hast thou done for Me?"*

Inspired by the probing question, she wrote her famous poem, *"I Gave My Life for Thee."* But she was not happy with the poem at the time, so she threw it into the fire.

But there came a strong downdraft that blew the paper out of the fire and onto the hearth. Feeling that this might have been providential,

Miss Havergal took the slightly scorched paper, folded it, and sent it to her father in England. He composed a tune to match the words and had it published, and although this is not the tune that we find in most hymnals, the words challenge us to service for the Master.

We have the same picture of the shadow of God's hand in the sixteenth verse of the fifty-first chapter, where, speaking of His people, He says, *"I*

have covered thee in the shadow of Mine hand."

Is this not an excellent text for any preacher? Every one of us who will speak a word for Jesus shall have a share in it. This is where all who are workers for Christ should long to be, "in the shadow of His hand," to achieve His eternal purpose.

What are any of God's servants without their Lord but weapons out of the warrior's hand, having no power to do anything?

I seem to recall someone (it may have been Spurgeon) saying once that we ought to be as the arrows of the Lord which He shoots into the conflict; and so great is His hand of power, and so little are we as His instruments, that He hides us away in the hollow of His hand, unseen until He darts us forth.

As workers, we are to be hidden away in the hand of God, or to quote the other figure, "in His quiver hath He hid me:" we are to be unseen till He uses us.

It is impossible for us not to be known somewhat if the Lord uses us, but we may not aim at being noticed, but, on the contrary, if we be as

much used as the very chief of the apostles, we must truthfully add, "though I be nothing."

Our desire should be that Christ should be glorified, and that self should be concealed.

Alas! There is a way of always showing self in what we do, and we are all too ready to fall into it.

You can visit the poor in such a way that they will feel that his lordship or her ladyship has condescended to call upon poor Maggie; but there is another way of doing the same thing so that the tried child of God shall know that a brother beloved or a dear sister in Christ has shown a fellow-feeling for her, and has talked to her heart.

There is a way of preaching, in which a great academic has evidently displayed his vast learning and talent; and there is another way of preaching, in which a faithful servant of Jesus Christ, depending upon his Lord, has spoken in his Master's name, and left a rich unction behind.

Many things must be hidden from a child, and the more sensitive he is, the stricter the concealment. We are so timid and unschooled that God has to often place the shadow of His hand across our vision, just as the Alpine guide will blindfold a

nervous traveller so that he may guide him unharmed across some terrifying chasm.

Many of God's mysteries are things that He has hidden from us to the glory of His pity and gentleness. He has to guide us over a great many of the perilous places of life.

Within the hand of God is the place of acceptance, and safety; and for service it is the place of power, as well as of concealment.

God only works with those who are in His hand; and the more we lie hidden there, the more surely will He use us before too long.

May the Lord do unto us according to His word, *"I have put My words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of My hand."*

In this case we shall feel all the former emotions combined: awe that the Lord should condescend to take us into His hand, rest and delight that He should choose to use us, trust that out of weakness we shall now be made strong, and to this will be added an absolute assurance that the end of our being must be answered, for that which is urged onward by the Almighty hand cannot miss its mark.

Part 6:
The Shadow of the Cross

In 1967 a young student at the University of Cincinnati named Charles Murray was training for the summer Olympics of 1968 as a high diver. Although I have researched this I have been able to find much to fully authenticate this story, but as it has been repeated often, there must be at least a grain of truth in it, and I believe it worth repeating.

Charles was very patient with Kevin Burden, a fellow student, who would speak to him for hours about Jesus Christ. Charles was not raised in a home that attended any kind of church, so all that Kevin had to tell him was a fascination to him. He even began to ask questions about forgiveness of sin.

Finally the day came that Kevin put a question to him. He asked if Charles realized his own need

of a redeemer and if he was ready to trust Christ as his own Saviour. Kevin saw Charles' countenance fall and the guilt in his face. But the reply was a strong "no."

In the days that followed Charles was quiet and often Kevin felt that he was avoiding him, until one evening Kevin got a phone call and it was Charles. He wanted to know where to look in the New Testament for some verses that Kevin had given him about salvation. Kevin gave him the reference to several passages and asked if he could meet with him. Charles declined his offer and thanked him for the Scripture. Kevin could tell that he was greatly troubled, but did not know where he was or how to help him.

Because Charles was training for the Olympic games, he had special privileges at the University pool facilities. Some time between 10:30 and 11:00 that evening he decided to go for a swim and practice a few dives.

It was a clear night in October and the moon was big and bright. The University pool was housed under a ceiling of glass panes so the moon shone bright across the top of the wall in the pool area.

Charles climbed to the highest platform to take his first dive. At that moment the Spirit of God began to convict him of his sins. All the Scripture he had read, all the occasions of Kevin's witnessing to him about Christ flooded his mind.

He stood on the platform backwards to make his dive, spread his arms to gather his balance, looked up to the wall and saw his own shadow caused by the light of the moon. It was the shape of a cross.

He could bear the burden of his sin no longer. His heart broke and he sat down on the platform and asked God to forgive him and accept him.

Charles Murray trusted Jesus Christ some twenty feet in the air.

Suddenly, the lights in the pool area came on. The attendant had come in to check the pool. As Charles looked down from his platform he saw an empty pool that had been drained for repairs. He had almost plummeted to his death, but the shadow of the cross had stopped him from disaster.

Part 7:
Applying God's Shadow to Ourselves

You can have the protection of God's shadow (as history tells us) that, for example, Queen Victoria had.

A British express train raced through the night, its powerful headlamp spearing the black darkness ahead. The night train was carrying Queen Victoria.

Suddenly the engineer saw a startling sight.

Revealed in the beam of the engine's headlights was a weird figure in a black cloak, standing in the middle of the tracks and waving its arms. The engineer grabbed for the brakes and brought the train to a grinding halt.

He and his fellow trains-men climbed out to see what had stopped them. They could find no

trace of the strange figure. On a hunch, the engineer walked a few yards farther up the tracks. Suddenly he stopped and stared into the fog in horror. A bridge had been washed out and had fallen into a swollen stream. If he had not heeded the shadowy figure, the train would have plunged into the stream.

While the bridge and tracks were being repaired, the crew made a more intensive search for the strange flagman. But not until they got to London did they solve the mystery.

At the base of the engine's headlamp was a

huge moth. The engineer looked at it for a moment, then on impulse wet its wings and pasted it to the glass of the lamp.

Climbing back into his cab, he switched on the lamp and saw the "phantom flagman" in the beam. He knew what had happened: the moth had flown into the beam, seconds before the train reached the washed-out bridge.

In the fog, the shadow of the moth appeared to be a phantom figure waving its arms.

The moth had sacrificed his life so that his shadow could save others.

When Queen Victoria was told of the strange happening she said, "I'm sure it was no accident. It was God's way of protecting us."

Trust in God's shadows. He will protect you too.

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